STAGE ILLUSIONS.

The Reality of the Players' Life Vividly Portrayed for Would-be Actresses.

A Comedian Amusing an Audience While two of His Children Lay Dead at Home.

Adelaide Neilson's Sufferings—Trials and Hardships of Members of Traveling Companies.

New York World: In the morning papers of the past few days there have been announcements published to the effect that Miss Mary Anderson and Mrs. Langtry had been compelled, by order of their physicians, to discontinue their labors until their health would permit their return to to the stage. For five months these talented ladies have been playing seven times a week, sick or well, in good or in bad spirits; traveling from place to place, sleeping in strange beds, eating food indifferently prepared, drinking water of many kinds, and suffering many annoyances incidental to a tour. If they—the successful ones—cannot stand the pressure, how about the lesser ones?

To a person seated in the orchestra stall it would seem that to the actress who is called in front of the curtain at the end of the act to be received with resounding applause a thrill of pleasure must ensue. She stands there, smiling and bowing her acknowledgments; the audience continues to applaud and some ass in the balcony brays out, "Speech." "Is she not lovely?" the women ask, and the men file out to take a stimulant, overcome with emotion and coarsely comment on the charms and graces of the actress. To her the applause is as natural as the performance itself. All through the scene she has received applause at lines where she received them when she first played the part, and the call before the curtain if not given would have produced in her a genuine sensation. After the act did she not at once walk to the entrance and wait a moment, so as not to appear too soon? Is there not just as much acting in this little play before the curtain as in parts of the piece itself? Is it not a part of the performance? Night after night she does not know a face in the audience, she hardly realizes that they are people; how can she then attach much satisfaction to the applause? It seems delightful; that is all.

Suppose while she stands there smiling as though delighted with the overwhelming applause the person seated in the front row realized that she was hurrying through the part and was anxious to leave the theatre, as her child was dangerously ill at home! Would that person then believe she was thrilled with joyous pleasure?

I was standing on the stage of the Fifth Avenue theatre one night some years ago talking with George Fawcett Rowe. It was the first night of a new play. The comedy role was taken by a clever comedian whose name I have forgotten. "It won't go," said Rowe to me quietly, "and I don't feel as much for the play and myself as I do for that poor devil." He pointed out the comedian. "His boy died this morning and his only other child, a little girl, was dying when he left to come here." I looked on the stage. Was it possible that the tall man whose faces, attitudes and queer expressions were convulsing the people with laughter was the heart-broken father? Were those tears the audience saw and believed mock tears wrung wrung from his aching eyes? indeed they were. "My God!" said Rowe, "how he suffers!"

"Was there no way out of it?" I asked.

"He came to me this afternoon and told me of his sorrow. I said, 'I won't ask you to play, old man; you know there is no under-study. If you can't play why we will have to postpone.' He realized I had the theatre only for a week as it was; so he said, 'I'll play.'"

Every time he came off the stage he asked if any message had come for him. He received none. The management had left an order at the stage door to hold all letters, telegrams and messages until the performance was over. Imagine the agony of the man's mind. A message had come; the child had died.

A certain distinguished actress was playing in a neighboring city; night after night the house was packed from gallery to parquet, and her manager looked with pleasure upon the receipts of the box office and with alarm upon her. She had taken a severe cold while traveling, and had by great exertions and powerful drugs overcome it during the day to appear at night. Every morning found her weaker and weaker, and realizing this she became very nervous. One night she was to play Pauline. The curtain was up and she sat moaning in her dressing room; she dragged herself to her entrance and at her cue she walked on the stage. I expected to see her fall every minute. Never, indeed, was a Pauline so in need of smelling-salts. So wonderful was her strength of mind and so great her art that the audience never knew that she was a sick miserable woman. During the act Pauline leaves the stage and after a brief interval returns. I wondered how she would pass through it, whether her nerves, wrought up to the highest tension, would relax, and leave her unable to return. Pauline is supposed to be in her father's house; instead, Adelaide Neilson—for it was Neilson—sat on a broken cane-bottomed chair half swooning, her dresser holding smelling-salts to her nostrils and a doctor giving her brandy. She went on, and still the audience did not know how she suffered. Between the acts she was hysterical. Her scene in Widow Melnotte's cottage was the finest I have ever seen; she gave way to her hysterical condition, controlling and twitching the nervous power to suit the role. She held up through the performance with amazing strength, but when the curtain was rung down she fainted. The audience did not understand why she did not come before the curtain in answer to their applause. She was carried from the stage to her dressing-room and taken home in the costume worn in the last act.

These are the trials of the prosperous ones who are never in need of engagements, who are sought after, sighed for, coddled by managers and adored by the public. Still this is not all they have to contend with. The habits and health of the various members of the company affect them, too. When those with whom they act the most important scenes are ill it fills them with nervousness and anxieties. It is always something. But the smaller ones! The little people of the theatre, what a time they have of it! Those industrious, hopeful souls who feel that they are on the lower rungs of the ladder, aspire to climb it and push their heads up among the stars.

It is bad enough when these young women of the theatre are playing in well-organized companies in metropolitan theatres, but when they belong to small companies, managed by irresponsible men, and are taken from one small town to another, life loses its attractiveness. How many traveling men have awakened on the great western night trains at an early hour to see a company of actors and actresses board it to go to the next town. Sometimes it is 2 o'clock in the morning. How often only one or two of the entire company secure berths, while the others go into the regular cars and try to make themselves comfortable on the hard seats. After a night of catch-as-catch can naps to play the next evening. Poor accommodations, poor food, bad treatment and often no pay is the real side of many an actress's life. And still people talk about the stage and women yawn in comfortable surroundings of the tediousness of life.

I referred to a young lady who wanted to go on the stage, and I will now mention one who wanted to go, and went whether her pa would or no. Papa was stern. He said, simply: "Choose your own life; it must be either on the stage or in my house." Having gone, he said: "You are no longer a child of mine." Mamma, firmly convinced that her fair, foolish daughter was now seated on the primrose-lined toboggan slide to the eternal bonfire, closed her ears.

With the flourish of trumpets her manager had announced her as the "beautiful Miss X——, a member of Ward McAllister's 400," and the newspapers had rung all the changes on her beauty. She had played two weeks in her own city, and her manager had taken her elsewhere. In Elsewhere she was but little known, and her manager went to the wall. What was she to do? Go home? Oh, no; too proud for that! She joined a company. As a member of a company she went west, playing in many towns.

It was in one of these small towns I met the young lady, who had been accustomed to luxury; it was at the railroad station. The company had come to a standstill; the the manager had vanished; the sheriff was in possession of the theatrical property, and the hotel keeper had attached the personal baggage of the members. Miss X—— sat on a small trunk containing her effects. She told me her trouble, stating that the leading man was trying to negotiate a loan in the stores on her diamond ring, his watch having gone at the last town; and with its proceeds she proposed to settle his bill and her bill, buy tickets and start for Chicago. Four other women walked up and down the platform, chaffing the deputy sheriff and ticket seller, while the men of the company were negotiating loans as a finance committee. How her dreams of the stage must have vanished; how the illusion must have faded!

In spite of all the records and reports, a romantic mist seems to veil the stage and the players, and the public continues to idealize the conditions. It is strange, very.

ANECDOTES OF TENNYSON.

Remarkable Absent-Mindedness—Mutton Cut in Chunks—An Ink Stain.

London correspondence: R. W. Emerson once spoke of the poet Tennyson as one of the finest looking men in the world, with a great shock of dark, dusty hair, bright, laughing, hazel eyes, clothes cynically loose, his face massive, yet most delicate, with a musical, metallic voice and speech, and speculation free and plenteous. We must all agree with Emerson in his admiration of the poet's grand head, but at the same time we could wish for a little less poetic license about his person, and for ourselves own to a slight weakness for clothes of a more soigne nature. Absent-minded to a degree, Tennyson often forgets to whom he is speaking, and once when in full conversation with Robert Browning said, apparently apropos de bottes: "I wonder how Browning's getting on?" "Why!" exclaimed Robort, "I am Browning!" "Nonsense!" replied Tennyson, with almost an attempt at roguish raillery, "I know the fellow well, so you can't tell me you are he."

A few years ago some enthusiastic admirers of Tennyson gave a large dinner party in his honor, and invited all their choicest friends in the world of literature and art to meet him. Tennyson, who rarely accepts an invitation, did, for a wonder, put in an appearance on this occasion, but during the first half hour of the dinner caused the greatest disappointment by remaining absolutely silent, and as if lost in the most profound reverie. The guests, who had expected to hang on words falling like pearls of thought from his lips, gazed somewhat wistfully upon him, when suddenly rousing himself, he exclaimed in a loud stentorian voice: "I like my mutton cut in chunks!" I cannot help suspecting that there was something of malice prepense in this burst of confidence, and that the poor man felt a not unnatural irritation at being gaped at, and a corresponding desire to punish the offenders.

An anecdote told me not long ago by his daughter-in-law is amusing, in that it shows how the greatest are not incapable of stooping to little weaknesses. Some very dear friends of Tennyson's who had been spending some years in Persia, returned to London, and, anxious to renew old ties, wrote inviting him to their house. But Tennyson mistook the day and arriving at the domocile, found the birds flown. Sitting down to write a note of explanation, he had the misfortune to throw the contents of a well-filled ink bottle all over the beautiful new white Persian carpet. The maid-servant, in answer to his summons, appeared with a large jug of new milk, which she poured over the offending ink stain. "I'll give you five shillings, my good girl, my very good girl," continued Tennyson, in much agitation, "if you'll only get rid of that abominable ink before your master and mistress come home." And together on their hands and knees poet and Abigail rubbed and rubbed at the wretched carpet until not a spot remained. The girl earned her five shillings, and when a few weeks afterward Tennyson went to dine with his friends he had every reason to believe that she had told no tales. At any rate his host and hostess displayed their gorgeous carpet without any signs of consciousness.

A Killing on the Border.

EL PASO, Tex., March 29.—There is considerable excitement on both sides of the river over the shooting of two Mexican policemen at Paso del Morte last night by four Americans whom the police attempted to arrest for disorderly conduct. The Americans escaped to this side by swimming the river. One of the policemen is dead and the other badly wounded.